Tape: 007

Transcript of Interview with Roscoe E. Bell

Conducted by Jim Muhn

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INTERVIEW WITH ROSCOE BELL
Tape Transcription

[Conducted by Jim Muhn, Land Law Historian for the Bureau of Land Management, sometime between 1987 and 1996]

MUHN: Could you first provide a brief summary of your life: where you were raised, education, and your career in the natural resource management.

BELL: I was born March 11, 1905, of rural parents in southern Idaho. Parents who were very dedicated and supportive of their children, and we didn't live in luxury, but our basic background was agriculture ... truck farming and that type of thing. Graduated from high school at Raymond ... Paschal, Washington, after we had lived in Idaho and western Washington and back to Paschal, Washington, where I ... during the war years ... World War I years, I worked part time as a ... in a veneer plant, and sawmill while I went to school. We moved to Paschal, and I finished my high school there, and then went on to Washington State University. I majored in agriculture, with a minor in education, and my major agricultural interest was in soil science.

After graduation, or during my senior year, as a matter of fact, I had a teaching scholarship part time, and finished my senior year, and stayed on the faculty as an instructor from 1930 ... 1927, when I graduated, right on through 1931, as instructor while I did graduate work leading to a Master’s Degree in Soil Science, and completed course requirements for a Ph D. I didn't write my thesis while I was there.

Then we moved to Idaho, I was on the faculty at the University of Idaho, as an assistant professor of agronomy, handling all the soil science work for the University. I did some extension work ... agricultural extension work ... and for a few months was out starting the wheat allotment program in two Idaho counties. That was the New Deal wheat program.

Then in '35, I joined the Farm Security Administration, Department of ... well, it was actually under an independent agency, formerly the ... the Resettlement Administration under Rexford Tugwell. Was in the Regional Office at Portland, working for three northwest states, as a land classification specialist, and heading a land classification unit. Three years later, moved to Portland ... to Berkeley, and I was working the seven western states in the same general capacity, until I was appointed to the position of State Representative of the Bureau of Agriculture Economics for California.

Worked with the California Water Board until Congress decided not to appropriate money for our work anymore, and so I then joined the War Relocation Authority, and went to central Utah project with the WRA, Japanese war relocation, and was in a city of 8-10,000 people with the farm program. I was in charge of agriculture, and later other operations, including engineering, motor transport, and fire protection.

Following three years' service there in the camp, we moved back to Portland. I accepted a position with the Fir ... with the Bureau of ... with the Bonneville Power Association as an industrial analyst. Because of my background in agriculture, they were anxious to find out if there was some potential for the development of the western phosphate fertilizer program, in using western phosphate resources of Idaho, Wyoming, and adjacent Utah. And the possibility of electrical processing of the ... of the rock, phosphate, into fertilizer and oth ... chemicals. Worked on that for three years and developed a preliminary analysis of the western phosphate industry, which received a lot of national and international attention, as a prospectus that was a springboard for some of the companies that were interested in developing the resources in the western states.

Then I joined BLM as Assistant Director. After a while, then Associate Director, working under Marion Clawson. Clawson and I had worked together when we lived in Berkeley, and I'd worked with him on some projects he was working on ... the Columbia Basin studies, and I did some

work on soil adaptability, and economics of the development of agriculture in the Columbia Basin in Washington.

So was with Clawson, then for ... from '48 to '51 as a ... in the Washington Office. Then when we had a vacancy in the Regional Directorship in Pacific Northwest Region, I was best ... best qualified person to pick up where Dan Goldy, the former Regional Administrator, would now then resign. Where he left off, with that program in Pacific Northwest, so I came to Port ... back to Portland, and served in that capacity from '51 through '53, and in '53, with a change of administration and ... in fact, that was contaminated, "by my association with Bonneville Power ... public power issue." I ... I was terminated as Regional Director.

Matter of fact, they reorganized the Bureau on an area basis, instead of regional basis, so that they could abolish the Regional Administrator jobs, and I was given the opportunity to go to Alaska at that time. Incidentally, it was a demotion, but anyway ... to make ... and the job description called for making a ... a study of the public land resources in Alaska, and what might be required on the part of the government, the BLM, to keep Alaska mainly a public land state. To help the resources and make it possible for the resources to be developed.

That was a two-year assignment, but it was terminated after ... shortly, in November of the following year. But, in the meantime, I ... one of the first resources I started working on was the oil and gas mineral resources. I prepared a prospectus which I got ... I prepared it for publication by the Bureau, but it was never published. I did put out a hundred copies of that report in review draft, so that it got around to ???? and was credited as having some very considerable influence on the interest in oil and gas prospecting, and development, exploration in Alaska at that time.

Then I was reassigned to ... or given an opportunity to go to Egypt for a couple of years, where I served as a Natural Resources Adviser to the government of Egypt, and headed up a ... a small unit of professional people, an engineer, a social scientist, ????, health people, on a land ... large

scale land reclamation demonstration on the delta of the Nile, and also in the desert. We ... our ... called the EARIS, the Egyptian American Rural Improvement Service, which included land reclamation, community development and relocation of landless farm families, development of the villages and the schools, the whole program ... the whole ... life in the village.

We served there until the Suez crisis. Came out under fire with the help of the Navy Sixth Fleet ... from Alexandria at the time of the Suez crisis. And ... and back to BLM ... had reemployment rights with BLM, so I came back and took a job as ... as Program Officer for Area 2, which was headed at Salt Lake City at that time. And worked ... and Neil Nelson, who was originally the Area Administrator in Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, those four states. That was ... for two years, I served in that capacity as Program Officer, analyzing the programs of the area, and suggesting changes and modifications of program and policy. So, it was a very interesting assignment. I ... I wasn't interested in staying in that position for any len ... major length of time, but it was good experience while it lasted, and I had been contacted by a representative of the State of Alaska, who was ... who was then being programmed for Natural Resources Commissioner for the State, and he wanted to have someone to head up the Division of Lands, and I was contacted in that regard. And I expressed an interest because of my past experience.

Incidentally, when I came back from Egypt, I did take one semester at the University of Wisconsin as to strengthen my academic background in the resour ... economics of underdeveloped areas, and also in the geography of the Northlands. That was my semester there. I was able to use some annual leave to make it possible to enjoy that semester there, that graduate work.

Then I then moved to ... accepted the position in Alaska, when Alaska became a state, and I had the privilege of ... of building from scratch a Division of Lands, with its responsibility for land selection, land classification, and land disposal under the ... fact, we designed the regulation covering sale lease, sale homestead, and land and then the forest management program was a part of our

job, as was oil and gas leasing, minerals, and survey and the other services that go along with it, and parks, and later, water ... the administration of Water Act was part of our job, too.

We had lots of fun the next 8 1/2 years, and when there's a change of administration, I resigned and served on the Public Land Law Review Commission's Advisory Council. But was ... went to Wisconsin to serve as a consultant to the team that had the contract with the Public Land Law Review for the Alaska studies. Following that, in 1970, I chose there in Wisconsin in 1969 thru ... or '68, I should say. And so, came back to Portland in 1969, and after my term of that year, went to Wisconsin.

And then in 1970, I accepted a part time job as consultant to British Petroleum, Alaska, BP Alaska, and served on a part time basis as a legislative consultant for them. So, I served that way the next 5 years, so I then finally decided to retire full time. So, I've been retired full time, except I do give lectures on the Alaskan earthquake, and the oil and gas pipeline, and development of oil and gas in Alaska, and other imbec ... and our life in Egypt, and talking ... gave quite a few slide talks and that sort of thing as a part of my retirement activity. That's a quick rundown, but ... and not too well connected, but I think you can follow that pretty well.

MUHN: Do you have any personal and professional papers, and if so, have you left them with any institution?

BELL: The Truman library contacted me and asked if I had anything that would be of interest in my activity in the ... in the Truman Administration. I said, well, yes, I had some papers, miscellaneous papers, that I ... and I bundled up a couple of boxes. I think mainly, develop ... it had to do with the ... the phosphate ... western phosphate program, which was engaged in ... with Bonneville then. I believe that's mainly what I had there. I haven't reviewed what I sent to them, but ... lately, but I'd had some correspondence and we visited the library, and afterwards ... Well, I did this in 1975.

I contacted the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, college, said I would like to get down some of the ... some of our thinking about in the early days, because I hadn't written much, and then things weren't, at home, weren't not so that I could settle down and do a lot of writing. And so, I went up to the University, and put in their oral history file, a ... oh, was three or four days, I was ... I was responding to questions, as well as telling what we were thinking about. And that's on tape, and also that has been transcribed, so it's available at the University, and so there was several days of hear ... of conference was transcribed.

Now most recently, just ... just within the last month, the State of Alaska is suing a group of oil companies for adjustments in the ... in the compensation called for in oil royalties. And they have quite a lot of money at stake, because different companies have computed the wellhead value of the oil differently.

And so, starting with those papers that I had dictated for the oil history file at the University of Alaska, and the work I did with BLM in 1934, ... 30 ... 1953, '54, they wanted to get together the whole story on development of ... of oil and gas leasing policy, and so these attorneys asked me to give deposition, and I couldn't go up there, so they came here and for two days, I was giving deposition, and I ???? ???? history. That is going to be ... probably be in court sometime in the next ... probably 4 or 5 months, when they get into court and the depositions will be forthcoming. But ... so there was about 6 ... about 8 hours of deposition, about 150 pages, and they videotaped it, and as well as trans ... had a court reporter there, so I've read the court report, I think it's about 150 pages that we did. So that's the other ... other records.

We've only written for the benefit of our family, stories that ... personal ... stories of what happened, when and where, in our course of our career. Wife and I have been ... traveled to all those ... worked together, and the family's always gone wherever we've gone, and where the job's gone, and so, ... story of our life, and that's ... we have jointly written up some stories on that, but no

public ??? reports or anything of that sort. We've had a fascinating life, ... fact, we got to our 62nd anniversary. A busy time we've had.

MUHN: Are you aware the State of Alaska has written a history of the state land program?

BELL: No.

MUHN: I will see if I can get you a copy.

BELL: Okay.

MUHN: Tell me how you came to become Associate Director of BLM under Clawson.

BELL: Well, Mr. Clawson didn't have an Associate Director when I first came on. I was the first Associate Director. I came on as Assistant Director and then the job was reclassified to Associate Director. The title Associate or Assistant Director didn't make any difference, except it gave me a higher rating, when I was made Associate, which was appreciated, of course.

But in that period, there were several things that were very important. I'm sure Mr. Clawson brought that out in your discussions with him. But decentralization of responsibility was a major feature of the period, and it was also very important to clean up the administration. BLM had the reputation of being one of the two worst administered bureaus in the Department of Interior according to Secretary Krug. And we changed that in the period that Clawson was in the saddle, and I was working with him very closely. But decentralization of authority was extremely important, to cut down the time lag between receipt of applications and processing and finally getting action taken.

And then we--the administration had been so lax or unmanaged that we were getting complaints--letters of complaint at the rate of about 300 a month, and in the period I was there, we got it down, so we got 25 or 30 a month, so that was a fairly substantial improvement.

But Clawson administration got started, launched the first beginning of the modification, improvement, of the whole record system, and the ... was a start with the microfilming all of the land patents that had been issued. I think about 6 million land patents that had been issued by the government, and we had copies of them that were being called for by people who wanted to go back to the original record, land title work, you see. And those records were getting so badly beaten up, that it was a just a question of physically falling apart, and he did get a special appropriation for starting that, which then lead to the basic modification, or updating all the records systems, in all the land offices and everything. So, they finally got them in good shape over a period of years, but that was started--initiated by the Clawson administration.

Another important area of change was the whole method of handling oil and gas leases, and other actions, that is, assignments and whatnot. That ... that whole system was ... was changed so that, if it hadn't been, BLM during the oil and gas leasing rushes, would have been snowed under completely, if they hadn't had that change made. And as it was, many of the rushes were pretty hairy to handle.

Now that's ... we did ... we had one rather interesting episode of ... of a great snowfall in the winter of ... oh, golly, I don't know, but anyway, I remember it this way. The day that Truman was inaugurated as President, and he ... he defeated Tom Dewey, Assistant Secretary Warren got him to sign, and approve a state of emergency for the whole western states where the snowfall was so deep, so that we could authorize the use of the BLM equipment, and manpower, and all to help get feed to the starving livestock in the western states, particularly in Utah, but some in Nevada, Colorado, Montana, that whole area, and that was an interesting time, and we ... experience with a state of emergency that called for marshalling all of our resources to help keep ... to protect life and property, at that

time.

Now that's ... those are the things that I ... I think of right now, that was kind of outstanding for that period. You ... you may have questions. Yes. I can illustrate that decentralization. At the ti ... at the time I went into the office, everything had to be signed by the Director, everything ... actually everything.

So, the day I went to the office ... first day, I said to Marion, I said, Marion, what's my job? He said, well, here's your office. Nice, very comfortable office, big desk and everything. In the back of the room was a table, standard GI table stacked two feet high with documents. Twelve stacks of documents. He said, sign those. I said, you're kidding. He said, no, they've all been reviewed by the Secretary, and I ... I know they're all right to sign, so you sign them. And so, we worked all day, and I ... talking about things. And he went home at five o'clock, and I went in and started signing. I signed everything that I could sign there, these twelve stacks of cases. I got them all signed, and I didn't know sickum about what was in any of them, really. But I got them signed. I went home that night about ten, and got something to eat, and ... and came back the next morning at eight o'clock.

The office opened at 7:45, and so I was fifteen minutes that morning. Came in, the table was about half full, I said to my secretary "get this stuff out of here, I got it all signed." She said, "oh, no, that's a new batch." The table was half full. Well, this went on for about a month before we got the authority to decentralize the signing authority on simple documents, like assignment of an oil and gas lease, or a noncompetitive lease that was checked for form and everything's right.

Well, that kind of ... of burdensome signing that if you've signed them all, and had any idea what was in them, you didn't ... you couldn't do anything else. And so, it took us, I think, over a month to get the decentralization of the signing authority. That simple step taken. And then we had the absurd business of making refunds of 15 cents to somebody who'd overpaid on a request for a copy of a record, or something. And it cost $2.00 probably to repay

15 cents, but anyway, things like that that were going on that we had to get straightened out there, so that that part of thing ...

Then the decentralization of authority on signing oil and gas ... issuance of oil and gas leases was illustrated, I think, best by the fact that a person could apply for a lease, and if the land was ... a lease application ... segregated land, so that it was ... that was valid, a valid claim, the person who got that ... that ... filed that application, it was valid, and he could go out and peddle his interest to the highest bidder. And he could figure that he'd probably be two years before he'd have to enter into the lease, but his lott ... his peddling rights were protected during that period.

And we had ... Bud Simpson was the Office Manager at Reno ... or at Carson City, in the State of Nevada, and we got a very hot letter from California, from the lease broker, who said, I want to protest on this man Simpson, that you have over at ... at Carson City. I applied only two months ago for a lease, and I got the lease back inside of two months, and I've always been able to have two years time to peddle my interest. And he was real hot about that. Well, that was the kind of thing that we were real proud of that day, when we got that protest. There were others who protested decentralization, particularly Washington lawyers, who just thought we'd be messing things up most terribly if we decentralized.

But we put the authority out in the field, but actually, there were no major problems developed as a result of that, but those are illustrations of the kind of thing that makes sense, but you had ... took a lot of time to get, because the paperwork. A lease application was filed. It was registered in the land office, reviewed, and sent to Washington, and reviewed again in Washington. A lease offer was made to ... this is an oil and gas lease ... a lease offer was made and then, if it was ... the lease was written, and the guy then paid up if he wanted the lease. If he didn't want it, we'd refund his application fees. I mean, it was that absurd in those days, and you can see what ... what it meant, timewise, to do ... to get that kind of business handled. Okay, other questions?

MUHN: When Clawson became Director, he replaced many of Program Chiefs with new people from outside the agency. You yourself are an illustration of that. Was that a good move on Clawson's part?

BELL: That's right. Well, I think you needed ... you probably needed new faces to turn the agency around. Because you felt that ... that the people that were there had been there long enough to be so settled, that they couldn't see any possibilities of new ... new actions, of different actions, of turning the agency around.

And the agency needed to be turned around. That is, this is illustrated by a minerals officer ... oil and gas leasing minerals officer ... Bradshaw. We were talking one day before ... said, we need to do something to change the method of handling these oil and gas leases. And this was in 1948 or '49. Said ... I said, we really need to do something about it. He said, well, ... we just changed these a few years ago. I said, when, Bradshaw? He said, well ... 1924. Now Brad was a good man, very capable, and he was more open ... and he laughed at himself when he did ... when he realized how long it had been. And we did get the oil and gas lease changed ... forms and so on, changed. But that was illustrative that, in the old ruts, why, there they were, and we needed some new ... new blood.

Now, sure, I didn't know anything about BLM operations when I came to BLM. I didn't know a thing about ... other than I'd worked with some of the people in BLM in the phosphate program of Bonneville Power, and public land leasing was a field that I ... I touched on, but that was as far as it went. I didn't know anything about BLM, but he figured that a person could learn the ropes on that, but he needed some ... some new ideas, some open-mindedness. And he was looking for open-mindedness, mainly, and I tell you, some of them were pretty firmly fixed in the old ways of doing things. And some of them had a stake now ... in Clawson's book, he mentions Tom Havell, I think, and Tom deliberately would hold back from signing particular cases, where he knew that ultimately it would get to a Congressman, and he

wanted to show what a great guy he was to sign a lease and get it out, at the request of a Congressman. And he'd deliberately hold things back. Well, you know, with that kind of an attitude, you ... you don't ... it doesn't lead to production ... it was just production up.

I think it was ... it was ... it was kinda ... there were some rough spots in it, but actually, it worked out. It just took lots of guts, and Clawson had plenty of guts, as you know. And just determined to do something, and he was ... we enjoyed working together. We're ... had good working relations all the way through, and I had great respect for his ... for his abilities, of course. That's ... I'm not unique in that.

But there were quite a few in the field of range management. And that was his strong suit, of course, from his background. And he had ... in connection with the members of a ... of a range staff, he handled most of that ... most of the policy issues there, and ... but we did get into the ... there were some leasing policies involved in the phosphate leases, and things of that sort that I handled, mainly.

But then the one that came up, and became the hottest issue was in forest management in the Pacific Northwest, and so ... O&C land management, and I don't know how much you hit on that, but that ... that became quite a hot issue, and we had to change our Regional ... Regional Director here, Walter Horning, came back to Washington as Chief Forester, because he was a very competent forester. But had to have a change here, because it was a change of policy that was the Secretary of the Interior ... the Assistant Secretary Davidson got involved in, and Dan Goldy was very much aware of, and he ... and took on the Regional Directorship here and handled it. The problem there was in the management of the O&C, which is, as you know, is a checkerboard ... checkerboard ownership. And access to land, forest land, had ... to get a road through, you had to cross somebody else's land, couldn't avoid it. Even if you went the closest place, the corner ... the road gets awful narrow where two corners join, you know.

And so, they ... the whole matter of access to timber was

... was a very hot issue, and many of the owners would block up their ownership on the alternate sections in the checkerboard ... O&C checkerboard, and then they would want to ... they would control the management over the sale of the government timber, so that they would be in a position of advantage, and as one man said one time. Came in to protest to the Secretary of Interior, said, I've always been able to go to the bank and borrow money on the assurance that I was going to get the O&C timber that was on the checkerboard in my area. And he seemed quite ... quite alarmed that he wasn't going to be able to continue that. Well, Goldy fought that battle, and fought it hard and heavy, and took a lot of lumps because of it, but ... and when I came back to Portland as Regional Director, I simply followed in the line that he had started, but ... and so that wasn't a maj ... it was a major time consumer.

But in a major ... to still fight those battles, because you were fighting the big owner, the big timber company landowners, forest landowners, and all the complications of that. But then there were vast areas of O&C lands that did not have any roads, no roads of any kind into them, and that became a major situation that led to the ... to the development of a road system, and construction by the government of roads. We hadn't been able to get any appropriations for that, and so we had a big area of southwestern Washington where there was a lot of blowdown, and along with the blowdown of timber, it was old growth timber blown down in a big storm, and there was no roads there, and practically a solid block ... solid checkerboarded area of O&C timber, and I would call Marion on the phone, I said, well, probably had another problem. In blowdown timber, you had a vast increase in bark beetle infestation, and so ... was threatening to destroy it, the surrounding timber, too. But anyway, I said, well, maybe this is our springboard for getting in the road business. Here's a big emergency develops ... vast area of O&C timber blown down, no roads into the area, and the danger of insect infestation.

Okay, to continue with the access roads. What we had laid out, he said, okay, why don't you lay out a proposed program. We laid it out in regions, and Travis Terrell was the Chief Forester, along with Tom Conklin, I believe was a

principal architect of the ... the presentation. But they worked up an awfully good presentation, and about that time, Marion was asked to resign, and so I went back to Washington to present before the Senate Appropriations Committee the road program we'd proposed.

And the fellows had laid out on a large-scale map there, area ... the map showing the ... the ownership of the land, the O&C ownership, with an overlay to show the old growth timber, and another overlay to show the road system. And so, it was easy to go in before the Appropriations Committee, hang up the map showing the ownership, then showing the old growth timber, dropping the overlay, transparency, that showed the old growth timber, and then the second overlay dropped down to show the lack of roads in that area. And it was an excellent presentation they worked up for me, and I ... had it ... well received before the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the appropriation followed, but neither Marion nor I got to experience the actual construction, because that came later. But anyway, we got the appropriation. That was a major ... a very major start on it.

Another policy issue was how to wean the old ... the old advisory ... quote "advisory" committees for the range management districts, the forests ... the range districts to wean them away from the thinking that had developed in the old days when there was no control of the ... of the range land at all. No federal control, and no grazing fees to assist them where ... where there was some other considerations than just range use by a particular person who had used that range all of his life, and that was pretty major. That was real major.

It took a lot of weaning and a lot of ... a lot of patience in talking with the ... with the people that were in the districts, and some oh, hardnosed old characters that had herded sheep or punched cattle all their lives, and used certain areas, they were bound to use them. They didn't want anybody else to be telling them anything about how they used the land. So, we were still in that stage of ... all through our administration of ... of weaning and when I was in Portland here, I went out into the grazing districts and met with grazing districts advisory boards, and we got

good start made and Goldy had done some work on that. Then we followed up by having meaningful participation by wildlife people in the ... in the advisory committees.

So those were ... those were major problem areas, of course, the ... the resee ... the range reseeding, we were able to use the Halogeton, which was a weed, in some of the range areas, poisonous weed, that ... use that as a springboard to get some more appropriation for range reseeding. And because, if we reseeded the range, why, it controlled the Halogeton, which was this poisonous weed. And we were able to get some starts made, substantial starts on range reseeding. That had ... had long been needed and has continued since. I take some satisfaction when I drive through southern Idaho, seeing some of the areas that were reseeded, because it's a beautiful range reseeding program ... project in southern Idaho, eastern Washington, ... or eastern Oregon, I should say. Well, that ... those are the only things I think of right now, offhand.

MUHN: You thought very highly of Clawson. How was your fate tied to Marion Clawson's when he was fired by the Eisenhower Administration?

BELL: Uh-huh. Well, it was a sense of great loss, because his successor, Woosley, was not intellectually or otherwise competent by comparison, so it was a ... it was a great shock to have Marion terminated. But I didn't have time ... see, Woosley canned me as Regional Administrator along in September, and so we didn't experience much of ... because ... other [than] that kind of experience, we hadn't really got acquainted.

I'd met him before but had never gotten acquainted with him before and his ... his tenure in Idaho as State Lands Director had given him some qualifications in ... for ... for the work, but I think one of the prices of his ... of his appointment was my scalp, because Idaho Power is quite an influential ... quite an influential factory and politics at that time. Well, I don't want to ???? So, ... but anyway, Woosley, I think, had to fire me in order to be

appointed, but I can't verify that, but ... and I don't hold it against him. It's one of those things that happens, and so it ... it was a blow to me, cause I'd never been fired before, but that's ... I was down at Salmon, Idaho, and I had a call from Washington.

Woosley talked to me on the phone, said he wanted to make a change in Portland. I thought he was talking about Karl Landstrom, who ... Karl had gotten into hot water, cause he was pretty inflexible in his land ... he was a lands man in the Portland Office. He said, no, I'm talking about Regional Directorship. He ... the next morning, there was a piece in the paper, so I didn't have much time to turn around before it was published that I was being terminated.

One of ... yes ... I don't believe so at this point. I'm quite a ways away from it, in my memory, other than ... other than fire problems. The ... fixing liability for starting fires in the forested areas, and those are very difficult ... difficult problems, but we ... and we got into some where we ... where people on our staff ... again, was Tom Conklin had been an old logger, and Tom was out on a field trip with me, and along with some representatives of the Longmill Lumber Company, in an area where Longmill had ownership. And somebody else had been logging, and had ... had started a fire, got ... fire had gotten away from them. Well, the ... the ... there was a prohibition on use of powder in blasting for road construction, or for anything associated with logging during the fire season. And we went down and visited this ... where the fire had gone through, and Tom Conklin went over, decided to stop them. He says, ... see ... they were using ... using powder, cause he found the ashes of some dynamite sticks, a pile of it, right ... just right there where the fire had been started, so that they knew they were using powder at the time. So that ... that kind of thing was used as evidence in the suit against the road company that ... or the ... the timber that caused ... had been logging it, and started the fire, cause it burned {***Longbell***} and burned the federal timber at the same time. So that kind of thing was ... was important.

And one other ... one other problem that we had got in to ... southern Idaho ... there was a lot of ... a big flurry

of ... of drilling wells for and developing land under the Desert Land Act. And we felt there was an obligation not to allow willy-nilly claims that might result in overdraft of the ground water ... drawing down water ... more water than there was there and causing the water table to fall. Karl Landstrom was the sparkplug on that, but I had ... living in California ... had seen evidence of where, in the Santa Clara Valley, the water table had dropped as much as 200 feet, due to over ... over pumping, you see. And with all that damage, and all the ... cause where it'd been an artesian basin, well, they just overdrew it, and they had to construct very expensive, and extensive recharging facilities to recharge the ground water with ... with what would normally run off. And so, I was aware of that, and we got into very serious discussions with people. And I had a public hearing in Boise on this, as to how much we would allow, pending investigations by the Geological Survey of what the ... what the drawdown ... what would be a safe drawdown of the ... of the ground water. And that one was ... was quite hot at the time Woosley came in. That's why I thought that that ... that would be a source of problems with him.

MUHN: Under your tenure in Portland, BLM revised its policies for the Oregon and California revested lands, is that not true?

BELL: Yes, um, um. Right. Yes, again crediting Dan Goldy. Have you interviewed Dan? Yes. Well, I know how that is. But a ... a telephone interview with Dan would ... might ... might be worthwhile. But anyway, Dan was ... he was very cognizant of watershed, and recreational values, or environmental values in ... for ... for the time, and for that time period. He was well up on his toes on it, and probably would not be considered as to today, but at that time, it was significant. And he was very ... I think he entered into ... or BLM entered into an agreement on a particular watershed, where municipal water and ... municipal water supplies and forest management could conflict, but I know, we followed up on that. But it was ... pioneer work was done by Dan. But some starts were made at that time. And it was ... it was ... it was

groundbreaking.

MUHN: After Woosley fired you as Regional Administrator, you said that BLM sent you to Alaska.

BELL: Yeah. Well, it was business economist, I guess. Yeah, business economist. But I helped to write the job description, but the basic job description was to go up there and review the public land resources, and what action BLM should take to make it ... Yes. What action BLM should take to make the resources more available, or more ... to see if we could get some development, because Alaska was short on development. Had been a military base for years, and how to get something happening. And so, I thought that, one of the natural handles to take hold of was to start in on the oil and gas, and I reviewed just the geologic evidence ... the geology reports.

And fortunately, there was a map that had been ... had been prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey that showed classified areas of Alaska as to their prospective ... prospective possibilities ... areas favorable for oil exploration, possible oil exploration and the difference, there wasn't ... where there wasn't any apparent possibilities for oil and gas. And it identified vast of areas of Alaska where nothing was happening, that were prospectively valuable, particularly the North Slope, the Arctic Slope, see. Well, then I reviewed where ... where there were and mapped. Oil and gas leases had been issued, or were in effect, or applications were on the land. And where ... and found out by brain picking, and talking with a lot of people, where companies were interested or were doing anything for exploration, and then reviewed the status of land reserves.

At that time, the North Slope was all in ... either Navy Petroleum Reserve, or under public land 82, PLO 82 was ... was reserved for oil and gas ... reserved to the government ... so it wasn't available. Then a lot of military bombing ranges, and what not. And covered ... the land was covered with ... with reservations and so one of the main things was to get some of those reservations lifted so that oil

and gas exploration could occur. And even though this report was never ... Woosley didn't see it ... I prepared it for his signature, and sent it in. But even though he didn't see fit to ... to publish it, it got to enough people that were connected with oil companies that ... well, I see that Standard Oil is working over here, in this part of the country. What are we doing? What's our company doing? And it started out some explorations, and interest, which ultimately materialized in the discovery of the Swanson River oil field, and the Kenai, and that made statehood ... or was a factor in encouraging statehood ... passage of the Statehood Act, and then the state was created, and we built on from there.

But it wasn't ... we did the same kind of a job for the grazing, or grazing out on the Aleutian chain, the islands, the Aleutians, and Alaska Peninsula, and we did one for forestry, and one also for agriculture, that was not finished during my tenure, but Harold Jorgenson finished it up after I left. Did ... have you talked to Harold Jorgenson? No. It was Jorgenson and Johnson's book forecast that there might be an oil and gas ... oil refinery in Alaska by a certain year, and before the ink was dry on the book, why, the refinery was in operation. Of course, that's ... only attests to the time it takes to get something published. Okay?

MUHN: Tell me about your career as Director of State Lands in Alaska and your relationship with BLM when selecting the lands granted by Congress.

BELL: When I came back as State Director of Lands. Then my acquaintance with Alaska was ... and with BLM personnel was very helpful, and very important, and I just wanted to compliment the BLM personnel in Alaska. They had leaned over backwards to help us out, to get started. Of course, they trained some of the people that we hired away from them, but ... where we could, but it was a tremendous help to have a cooperative government agency to work with, and they were ... BLM personnel were very influential in the draft of the Land Act, sure, advising the legislature on that.

Either BLM people or ex-BLM people who were really effective in getting a good land act for ... helping to get a good land act for Alaska. Land Act ... the thing we discovered in the federal laws, they'd grown like topsy, and so one built onto another, and that didn't necessarily connect over the years, you see. Well, with starting new, we avoided the pitfall that had occurred, inadvertently I guess, in federal statutes, that in many cases, they were so specific that they didn't fit all of the conditions. Certainly, didn't fit a lot ... didn't fit Alaska at all, and I think a sign that we saw on a tree outside of a homestead, said, ... in Alaska, typified, said, Idiot's Paradise, Homestead for Sale. In other words, the homesteading didn't work, and of course, Jorgenson and others made that point, you know, Federal Homestead Act didn't work.

But then when it came to processing land selections, BLM was very cooperative, and where we felt it was an important area to have a withdrawal lifted, they tried to do everything they could to jar loose revocation orders to lift a withdrawal, so that we could make selection of the land, and then we could proceed with leasing, and that was very helpful. And then, in details in the survey program, land survey program, we had quite a knock-down, drag-out with Karl Landstrom, but we had support in Alaska, because the Statehood Act provided that BLM would ... that we would make selections of a certain minimum size.

That BLM would survey the exterior boundaries of those selections. Well, Karl Landstrom wanted us to select all of out of doors in one selection, so that minimize their job of surveying. Now, with the state of Alaska not having any money, I knew that we couldn't afford that, so I wanted to get the maximum amount of survey out of BLM by making smaller selections, so we made our selections basically in a pattern of half-township pattern, which was twice as large as the minimum required. And by doing that, we would get a pattern of corner monumentations, survey monumentation that would give us a basic net, survey net over land that we'd selected, and we went to the mat with Karl on that, and finally got it decided by Assistant Secretary Carver, and that it practically would go. And we

had a lot of prodding from Senator Greenly and some others on that too.

So, we did get ... that was one place where we had a problem, but it wasn't a problem locally. The ... one of the men BLM in Anchorage said, well, after all, we're Alaskans, too, and so they were anxious to see Alaska statehood work, and we were ... we had numerous, numerous places where we could have gotten bound up forever in trying to ... in quibbling over details, but by working together, we ... we kept the decks very clear, and we had a very minimum of problems.

We set up our land records system on the same basic pattern that BLM then had theirs set up, so we were able to coordinate land records, survey, land selection, and timber management, fire protection, we had an awful good contract with the BLM for protection of the land during the transition stage. Basically, they agreed to do it for so much an acre. So much an acre, on the basis of the area that we had patent to.

Well, recognizing that at sometimes, we'd make a selection, and we'd get tentative approval of the selection, and we had management authority of the land from the state, and we wouldn't get patent maybe until the survey was made, and finally filed, and oh, 3 years later, so we got free forest protection for the period between selection and patent, when we had the management authority, and could go ahead and manage. So, BLM was very cooperative on many, many ways. It was a good relationship, and I was real proud of the relationship we had, and the cooperation ... spirit of cooperation with BLM. Okay?

MUHN: Can you tell me anything about you last position with BLM?

BELL: Okay? Well, I'd be glad to do that, if you ... and on that basis, the skeleton that I've given here, I'll spend enough time, so it'll smooth it out.

Okay? Okay? Yes. That was an officer that was

responsible to the ... to the Area Director. To analyze all of the programs in the area, to see how they were meeting ... what the objectives were, how they were meeting the objectives, and how the objectives should be made. Now, they had quite an extensive program planning program worked out by Assistant BLM Director Thomas, and he had dev ... developed quite a program, and so, it was a program of ... was in charge of that, and we'd make a report each year, on the progress being made, and so on and so forth. I forget what his first name ... Thomas ... Thomas ... anyway, I'll think of it.

But anyway, that was ... that was the job, and it led ... it was coordinated with Budgeting and Management, and when it got to transferring it into ... into actions, and it got into Management or Budgeting, and so we had to evaluate our programs on the basis of money available or money that could be made available, or we'd recommend it be made available. And it was ... it was given quite a high priority in the Director's Office, except the Director wasn't sold on it. I got that the second year I was in Salt Lake City. We had a program conference and Woozley was there, and he essentially said, oh well, this is all very nice and pretty, but we don't pay any attention to it.

Well, that was ... that cinched my decision not to stay in that kind of a job. If the Director wasn't going to pay any attention to us, why, there's no point in doing all that busy work, and because it was quite an irritation to field people to take the time to program ... develop programs, and really do some thinking on it, and see where they're going, and then have the Director of BLM say, he didn't pay any attention to it. So that was ... that was when I made up my mind.

One thing I might say, back on the statehood deal ... Alaska statehood. Everett Brown, who used to be in range management in one of the Montana Districts, was reassigned ... was loaned to the Territory of Alaska, pre-statehood, and he worked there for two years, and did quite a lot of the ground work in Terr ... developing Territor ... land management for the Territorial lands, which were not very extensive because there was this school lands which were Section 1636, only problem was that there weren't any land

surveyed, so you couldn't find the sections, you see. Pre-statehood. But anyway, he developed a good program. He did ... did quite a lot of pioneer work that was of great value, and that was a contribution of BLM to ... by loaning ... loaning Brown to the Territory. I don't know whether you've come across that name yet or not.

And he has ... Everett Brown has passed away within the last year, but these ... these attorneys who talked with me a month ago, said they'd taken depositions from Brown within the last year, and that he had passed away. They got the deposition before he passed away. So, one time that ... that deposition, these depositions that they put together on ... are going to make a nice story on ???? but it takes the time to do it, to put together the story of the ... of the development of oil and gas leasing in Alaska.

Well, it was ... I had met Mr. {***Holtzworth***} when I was in Alaska, so he stopped ... he stopped by Salt Lake City one day, or called me up from Anchorage or Juneau, and asked me if I'd be available to talk with him. Some of my friends in Alaska had suggested my name, I think, and so he ... he stopped in to see me. That was before the Land Act was passed, and I said, well, if we have a Land Act that is possible to administer, I'd be interested, although I don't know what your salary scale is, and so on and so forth. He said, well, he'd keep in touch with me, and so he sent me a copy of the drafts of the Land Act, and I reviewed those to see how, if I had any particular comments on them. And I sent him back a letter of comment.

And then as soon as the statehood ... or the Land Act was passed, and he was appointed Commissioner of Natural Resources, why, he called me on the phone, and asked me if I was interested. And we talked a little about salary, and I said, well, ... we'd ... we'd corresponded and looked like the salary was ... would be a sacrifice actually to go, but I ... I said, well, I still was interested if there was any possibility. And so, keep in touch with me. And so, he ... he called me on the phone, and I said, okay, I'll ... I'll go. And that was ... we started for Alaska within a couple of weeks after that. Because we wanted to be up there July 1st, 1959. So, we were there bef ... when

the Statehood Act became effective, July 1st. So, it was interesting. Awfully interesting time. And of course, interspersed with such excitement as the great Alaska earthquake, and ... and discoveries of oil, and offshore drilling, and you know. We had a lot of interesting stories.

MUHN: Tell me about the Public Land Law Review Commission.

BELL: Okay. Yeah, I ... see ... they had ... the Commission, then it had an Advisory ... National Advisory Board, or Commission ... Advisory Board, I guess they called it. And people were selected because of their broad interest in any aspect of public land administration, and their competence or experience in the field. And I ... and I was approached by ... by Congressman Aspinall to ask if I could serve, and I checked out with administration ... state administration ... if I serve in that capacity as a member of that Commission and that's the way I accepted the appointment and served then. From ... well, let's see ... it was from ... I suppose the number ... the summer of 19 ... I guess 1966, or ... no, 1967. '67, '68 through till 19 ... let me get my dates right.

Yeah, when the report came up, I was in the Rose Garden when they gave the report to President Nixon. On the ... ???? attending public hearings and making comments on the basis of those public hearings to the ... to the staff, and then reviewing the report ... reports when they were in draft and commenting on them. I had a five-foot shelf of books on the Commission's reports and reviewed most of them. In draft, and then ... then made comments, so it was all of 1969, I was ... that ... that was my major activity, was ... was this voluntary ... voluntary work of reviewing drafts, but I was busy. It was a busy time because we reviewed all those drafts.

Well, I was tired. I thought they did ... really did pretty ... a good job. Yeah, I didn't have any argument in quitting. But again, I was tired enough so I just ... I figured, well, that's it, and I didn't ... I didn't really

analyze it after it was over. I just figured, well, we made our contribution. Let somebody carry it from here. And some things happened, of course, partly as a result of it.

Course this was one of ... I don't whether Marion ever said so or not, but Marion suggested this idea of a Commission to Congressman Aspinall, and others, and ???? it while he was still with BLM, that that ... that's what would be required, because piecemeal modification of the Land Act would seem like it was ... it was hopeless business. All the Land Laws that there were, for fun, maybe they'd get somewhere by doing more wholesale, and that, I don't think, has been accomplished.

But they have made some very important changes, have been made partly as a result of the Land Law Commission's actions. One thing it did for me, was it educated me as to the value of public hearings, and I'd had some experience with BLM in heading public hearings, and I did a lot of it in Alaska, whenever we drafted regulations, we had good public hearings and they really ... they really paid off. They were ... they were ... cause we had them all over the state. We started our hearings in Fairbanks or Anchorage, and went to all the major cities, and then ... the villages, actually, in the state to hold the hearings on a set of regulations, and got a lot of good suggestions, and a lot of understanding that you never got in any other way. So, it sort of demonstrated the value of public hearings.

Okay. Well, why don't why don't you shoot if you have some other questions. I still have a little tape left.

MUHN: Going back to Alaska. Can you discuss the problems associated with State Land Grant selections and Alaska Native claims?

BELL: Yes, yes, yes, I can. I attended several meetings that ... that dealt with the Native claims, and it was ... these hearings were very interesting. We had one up at {***Mintall***}, where ... where the {***village of Mintall***} had ... was located on the banks of the Yu ...

of the {***Canaw River***} [Yukon River???], but they ... everybody trapped out of {***Mintall***}. And the traplines, I said, well, you ... and ... and they said that a land selection there would destroy their pattern of use. And I said, have you protected your land? Well, we filed something with the Bureau of Indian Affairs a few years back, but nothing ever happened. The land was still open to entry, and people were using Land Act to ... to establish hunting camps and things of that sort. So, there was ... they were being invaded, gradually. I said, well, we'll file a selection on the area, and that'll protect it, then you keep your protest alive by protesting, cause I encouraged them to see that their rights were protected. And I said, can you ... can you show what your pattern of use has been? Traplines, and so on. They said, yes, we can do that. And so, I said, well, we'll send our field man up ... Joe Lawlor went up and sat down with them, and they mapped out a very nice map that showed whose trapline was where. All through the area. They had it all ... they mapped it on a quarter mile U.S.G.S. sheet, and had it all laid out very nicely, and so, that was one case.

Then we met with the Natives in other areas, and told them, protect your rights, for tribal issues, and patterns of use, why, do that. And I met with ... with them in several places, and Tom ... well, he kind of saw what the problem was. Basically, at the time before the Land Act ... or the Native Claims Act was ... was finally put in shape, why, they wanted to protect their rights to use of surface, and my recommendation was, give ... be generous in giving surface rights to any Native group, and ... and then ... then have the mineral rights retained by the state, and so on.

So that was the kind of solution I had recommended, but ... but the state administration didn't follow through on that one. And ... and so, that ... I didn't experience the whole of that ... whole battle. It blew out of the way by the time that was in the mill. Full blast. That was the way it was interesting. I had had experience with the menu clearance. Well, I think probably that ... we're getting close to the end. I better tune off here. And I'll send this to you, and you can transcribe.